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SONGS
OF THE
SOIL



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Songs of the Soil

By

Fenton Johnson

Author of

"VISIONS OF THE DUSK" and "A LITTLE DREAMING"



F. J.

35 West 131st Street

New York.

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FENTON JOHNSON



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To

E. J. B.

For the Gift of Enduring Faith.

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INTRODUCTION

The reader may notice that this third sheaf of verse, slight as it is, purports to represent Negro life;—the Negro life in the rural districts of the South. In my previous volumes I devoted myself to attempts at versification in the language of the academies and colleges; now I cast aside the English of the Victorians and assume the language of the plantation and levee.

The Georgian poets and writers are seeking romance out of their environment. I feel that a true artist can go no further than the American Negro for romantic inspiration. If romance is the element of strangeness then it is predominant in the race that claims my allegiance.

Behind the Negro there is a wealth of buried tradition. He is the most misunderstood creature in our latter day civilization. Builder of empires that have crumbled, and enslaved during the age of pirates and adventurers, he has taken his place in the greatest of republics as a peasant and menial. He has preserved none of his traditions, but has added to what we call Americanism his droll racial instincts.

Oriental and primitive, he is richly endowed with emotion. He is more keenly attuned to the chords of human feeling. A Negro can feel sorrow to a greater extent than his Anglo-Saxon neighbor; likewise he can display greater sensitiveness to humour. His humour is the humour of a vivid imagination; his pathos is born

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of deep sincerity. He has not been ruined by the culture of a decadent age, but through segregation and other methods, oppressive as they may be, he has been permitted to develop into a distinct group, original in ideas and expression.

To the Negro slavery is his epic hour. The freedom from restraint he enjoyed in his own circles kept alive those qualities he brought with him from Africa. The language he used during that period is so typical of him that the sons of the masters constantly associate it with him. (Nothing disgusts me more than to read in a metropolitan newspaper an interview with a colored man in which dialect is employed.) The heroes of that period, such as Turner, Douglass and Vesey, live in the popular imagination because they were what they were during the darkest days of Negro existence. Romance thrived. The cabin, the slave market, the crude but sincere songs of the bondmen had about them a glamour that grows more intense as the years advance. No institution in American life is more exploited than the Negro mammy. Her loyalty to Southern ideals has endeared her to every true son of Dixie. The Confederacy is dead, but Mammy lives on and on, the most glorious tradition in either race.

In these poems I have attempted to preserve that spirit. It is my earnest conviction that there is no true friction between the races. Race prejudice is not a product of the soil, but of propagandists who attempt to keep a certain political balance in the South. The masses of white people, if let alone, would love the Negro, and the masses of black people, if they were not disturbed by the result of propaganda, would love the white man.

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There is no natural reason for bitterness when we must consider that a large proportion of our Negro population has Caucasian blood in their veins and that the Negro has contributed more than his share to American welfare.

The Negro is of all creatures intensely religious. His religion is built upon emotion. As it is with all emotional creatures he makes vivid in his imagination the ideals of his faith. His Devil is an actual being who haunts him night and day, ready to pitch him any moment into a flaming dungeon. God and the angels dwell with him in his daily life. He awaits the Judgment Day as anxiously as a troubled world awaits the dawn of peace. As it was in the primitive days his ministers are both his leaders and his teachers. They administer to him a theology picturesque with the superstitions of a bygone world. They bring out of Nature, as all primitive people do, those forces they deem worthy of idealization.

The writer who purports to gain his inspiration from Negro life must not ignore such a religion. Neither must he treat it ludricously. The average Negro worshiper is not a hypocrite. He is sincere in his beliefs, probably more sincere than some of our New Thought followers or our Billy Sundays. He attends revival not as if it were a duty, but as part of a natural earthly routine. To miss such an opportunity to express his emotion would be more disastrous to his peace of mind than to miss his humble meals or his night's repose. It has reconciled him to conditions that no other race would or could endure.

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It is out of this religion that I have built my so-called Negro "Spirituals." For them I have discarded dialect; the barbaric splendor of those songs are lost in the dialect of the plantation. To clothe a Negro hymn with dialect is like writing the ancient Hebrew psalms in the Yiddish of the Ghetto.

So far as the reviewers are concerned my position will not be misunderstood. The kind notices that they have given me indicate that they desire me to do as I have outlined. But there is a group within my own race who bitterly oppose the writing of dialect. To that group I say that unless one gains inspiration from the crudest of his fellows, the greatest of his kind cannot be elevated.

But I do not hope to complete my career as merely a singer of the plantation. As I said in the beginning of this introduction there is a wealth of buried Negro tradition. I hope that it shall be my fortune to unearth it and give it to the world in some attractive form so that men may realize that the Negro has a history and is something more than a peasant.

Fenton Johnson.

December 26, 1915

New York City.



SONGS OF THE SOIL

DREAMIN' LAN'.

I.

De road to Dreamin' Lan' is mighty long,
But not so te' jus when you hab a song
Dat's sprinkled wid de sweetness ob de June
An' meller wid de sof'ness ob de moon.
Daih's anguls ha'fway down to Dreamin' Lan'
Dat's brown lak Sal wid eyes lak Lou Su'ran
An' all de night dey play de dreamin' ha'p
Ontwell at Dreamin' Gate yo' trab'lin' stop.

II.

So, honey babe, dat's sleepin' on mah breas'
Ef you am su'chin' fo' yo' hones' res'
Mak' frien's wid all de anguls passin' by,
An' when to talk wid you dey's drawin' nigh
Jes' grab f'um out daih pack a meller song
An' ring de dreamin' bell, "Sweet ding a dong."
Den, honey babe, befo' de mawnin's roun'
You's boun' to find yo'se'f in Dreamin' Town.

STEP RIGHT IN.

W'en Ah th'ows down de hoe, an' tells de' wu'k good night
An' f'om de cabin windu' flickahs candlelight,
'Tis den Ah dresses spick an' span to see mah gal
An' to de one hoss caht Ah hitch ol' speckled Sal.
Oh, long de road befo' mah Dinah's face Ah see,

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Oh, long de road befo' Ah hold huh on mah knee,
But twice de longness would Ah tak' if Ah wuld grin
Jes' lak Ah do w'en Dinah's sayin', "Step right in."

II.

In days to come de Mastuh's gwine to tak' de Book
F'um out de 'Co'din' Angul's han', and' gib a look
An' say, "Po' Sam dat lives in Cayolina's lan'
Should walk de Golden Street wid all de angul ban.
Come hyeah, you Gab'rul, spread yo' wings an' fly away
An' tell dat Sam to come to Me sometahm to-day."
Oh, den you's gwine to see erpon mah face a grin
W'en Gab'rul say, "De Mastuh want you step right in."

THE MIRACLE.

Though I was dwelling in a prison house,
My soul was wandering by the carefree stream
Through fields of green with gold eyed daisies strewn,
And daffodils and sunflower cavaliers.
And near me played a little browneyed child,
A winsome creature God alone conceived,
"Oh, little friend," I begged. "Give me a flower
That I might bear it to my lonely cell."
He plucked a dandelion, an ugly bloom,
But tenderly he placed it in my hand.
And in his eyes I saw the sign of love.
'Twas then the dandelion became a rose.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

IN LONELY LAN'.

I.

W'en you's in Lonely Lan' jes' think ob me,
How long Ah sit beneaf de willer tree
F'om mawnin' till de drappin' ob de dew
A-wondrin' if mah honey gal am true;
How long at night Ah walk de cabin flo'
A-trimblin' in mah shoes jes' fu' to know
If eb'ry rose am raid, an' vi'let blue,
An' if mah sugah loves me thoo an' thoo.

II.

W'en you's in Lonely Lan' jes' think ob me
All achin' fu' to hol' you on mah knee,
To whispuh honey wu'ds into yo' eah
An' wipe f'um off yo' face a drappin' teah,
To feel yo' fingah stroke upon mah haid
So gintle lak de angul 'mong de daid,
An' hyeah you say, "Ah loves you, honey boy,
You sho' is Dinah's hea't an' livin' joy."

PROTEST.

I.

Jes' livin' hyeah an' dreamin' ain't mah way,
An' doin' nuffin' kase Ah's ol' an' gray,
Ah'd lak to be a-wu'kin' in de fiel'
A-he'pin' fo' to mak' mah boa'd an' meal

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Ah'd lak to be among de thick an' thin
A-he'pin' fo' to mak' dis worl' a din,
Ah'd lak to shuffle 'long wid all de res'
Ontwell Ah fin' mahse'f in Glohry's dress.

II.

Ef Ah could only dance de' Ginny reel
Ontwell de mo'nin' light to earf do steal,
Ef Ah could only pick a banjo chune
Or go a-fiddlin' 'way beneaf de moon
Dis lazin' 'roun' would be a simple thing
Jes' lak de songs de Elduh's chillun sing,
An' me an' Dinah would be happy heah
Ontwell we hyeah ol' Gab'rul's trumpet neah.

A PLANTATION CHRISTMAS.

I.

De Chris'mus mo'n he's up an' come erroun'
An' joy's erbroad thoo all de livin' town,
Ol' Zeke's a-dancin' to de fiddle chune,
An' dance he will 'twell late dis aftu'noon
An' all de chillun's at mah cabin do'
While good ol' Mammy's croonin' sof' an' low
 "Mary's rockin' Jesus in de crib,
 Mary's rockin' Jesus in de crib,
 Mary's rockin' Jesus in de crib.
 Rock erway, O Mary! Rock erway!"

SONGS OF THE SOIL

II.

Ol' Cunnle Beavuh's manshun's bright an' gay
Wid chandeliah dat mak's de night lak day,
But in mah cabin shine de light of Gawd,
De light dat made de Chris'mus baby Lawd.
De white folks got daih eddicated cho'ds
While Ah's got nuffin' 'cept mah cabin boa'ds,
But, honey, dat am good while sweet de song
Dat Mammy's croonin' thoo' de Chris'mus long
 "Mary's rockin' Jesus in de crib,
 Mary's rockin' Jesus in de crib,
 Mary's rockin' Jesus in de crib.
 Rock erway, O Mary! Rock erway!"

PLANTATION REVERY.

I.

Jes' lazin' 'roun', wid nuffin' 'tall to do,
De fishin' bad, de hoein' dev'lish ha'd,
De weathuh hottah dan de pits ob Hell,
De cooles' spot ol' Cunnle Duncan's sod,
Ah see de shadders jumpin' 'cross de pon',
Ah hyeah de bu'ds a-singin' sof' to me,
"Oh, honey, res' yo' soul, yo' labour's done,
Yo' Marstuh's gwine to tote you 'cross de sea."

II.

'Jes' lazin' 'roun' befo' de break o' night,
No angul come to ease mah achin' hea't,

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Ah wondah whethah Dinah's callin' me
Whaih Jawdon's stream f'om earfly things de pa't,
Ah wondah whethuh Gab'rul's made mah baid
Befo' Ah th'ow aside dis heavy frame,
Ah wondah whethuh on de Golden Book
Ol' Marstuh Peter's wrote mah lowly name.

HARLEM: THE BLACK CITY.

I.

We live and die, and what we reap
Is merely chaff from life's storehouse;
For devil's grain we barter souls
And in his wine our bodies souse;
We build to Pleasure monuments;
But Pleasure always passes by.
The grave!—The grave! our only hope,
The grave where where dust grimed failures lie.

II.

We ask for life, men give us wine,
We ask for rest, men give us death;
We long for Pan and Phoebus harp.
But Bacchus blows on us his breath.
O Harlem, weary are thy sons
Of living that they never chose;
Give not to them the lotus leaf,
But Mary's wreath and England's rose.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

DE MUSIC CALL

W'en de music plays Ah pats de feet,
Kase de music feeds de hungry soul,
W'en de music plays Ah bows mah haid
Thinkin' dat ol' Gab'rul calls de roll.
Mak's no diff'unce whethah fiddle chune
O' de banjo hangin' on de wall,
Mak's no diff'unce if its 'Lindy's voice
Ah am boun' to heah de music call.

II.

Summahtahm jes' lose huh nach'ul heat
W'en she heahs a good ol' cabin chune,
Wintah feel his breas' a-gittin' wahn
W'en he heahs a song erbout de moon.
Rabbit prick his eahs, an' dance erway
W'en de fiddle man's erpon de hill,
An' de 'possum wid de ol' raccoon
Cut de pigeon wing jes' fit to kill.

III.

D'aint no wondah dat in olden tahm
Adam gib de angul Eden's lan',
Kase widout a chune dat's sweet o' gay
Eden's lonely fu' mos' any man.
D'ain't no wondah dat de grave am dull
Kase no music goes beneaf de groun',

SONGS OF THE SOIL

An' de man dat's daid, jes' lak a stone,
'Cose its nachu'l he kain't heah a soun'.

IV.

Honey' tak' dat banjo f'om de wall!
Play de chune you played in slav'y tahn,—
"Cuddle, cuddle to yo' lovah's breas'."
Lawdy! but dat music's got a cha'm.
Fifty yeahs, an' yet its meller, lak
Moonlight streamin' on de cabin flo'.
Hol' mah han', mah honey, sing de song
While mah soul goes out de cabin do'.

YOUR SOUL AND MINE.

I.

Your soul and mine have gone the way of life:—
The dusty road where toiled the elfin strife—
Your hand entwined this hand of mine in love,
Your heart induced to scorn the clouds above—
And all the world was like a rose crowned song.

II.

Your soul and mine have gone the way of life:—
We twain have bleeding wounds from Love's deep knife,
But you have kissed the tears that moist my cheeks
And lifted me beyond the cragged peaks—
And now the world is like a rose crowned song.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

THE LONELY MOTHER.

(A NEGRO SPIRITUAL)

I.

Oh, my mother's moaning by the river,
My poor mother's moaning by the river,
For her son who walks the earth in sorrow.
Long my mother's moaned beside the river,
And her tears have filled an angel's pitcher,
"Lord of Heaven, bring to me my honey,
Bring to me the darling of my bosom,
For a lonely mother by the river."

II.

Cease, O mother, moaning by the river,
Cease, good mother, moaning by the river;
I have seen the star of Michael shining
Michael shining at the Gates of Morning;
Row, O mighty Angel, down the twilight,
Row until I find a lonely woman,
Swaying long beneath a tree of cypress,
Swaying for her son who walks in sorrow.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

THE WOMAN OF MY DREAMS.

II.

In a City by the Sea
Dwells the Woman of my Dreams,
And she weaves a wondrous net,
Wondrous with the golden gleams
Of her Juno eye and her Juno soul;
And the burden of her song
Thrills my veins with wine a-new,
Thrills my veins for ages long.
 "Tirra lirra, tirra lirra,"
 Sings the Woman of my Dreams,
 "Tirra lirra, tirra lirra,
 Lover of mine, lover of mine."

II.

To that City by the Sea
I am going forth to-day,
In my hand a golden staff,
On my brow the flowers of May;
And a woman's love for mine,
And a woman's soul I claim,
Where the winged creatures dance
To the music of the flame.
 "Tirra lirra, tirra lirra,"
----Sings the Woman of my Dreams,
 "Tirra lirra, tirra lirra,
 Lover of mine ,lover of mine."

SONGS OF THE SOIL

EULOGY.

I.

Oh, daih's a fun'ul in de town to day,—
Go hitch de maih, an' let us gwi away,—
Dey say de Elduh preach, an preach him well,
Erbout de sinnah dancin' straight to Hell,
But dat he preach ol' Zeke to Glohry's lan'
Dough Zeke was fiddlah in de colo'ed ban'.

II.

'Po' Zeke! No mo' he mak' de Christ'un dance,
No mo' he mak' de congregashun prance,
De pine tree dat was growin' by his do'
Is now a coffin fu' to lay him low,
De rags dat cove'ed him is now a shroud
An' fu' his def de 'ooman's wailin' loud.

III.

Dey nevah called him saint o' Christ'un man,
Dey say de Debbil made his fiddlin' han',
Dey 'low dat when he winked ol' Nick was daih
An' at his def he rode him thoo de aih,
But many hea'ts have lost daih stony ways
W'en Zeke de good ol' fashioned music plays.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

DE PO' OL' MAN.

Heish!

De po' ol' man is daid.

Heish!

Sweet peace upon his haid;

He nevah knowed no wrong,

He made his life a song,—

De lowly an' de po',

De'flicted an' de so',

He gib tuh dem his crust.

(De way dey et would bu'st

De boss an' Cunnel, too).

An' now his wu'k is thoo

We drap de teahs lak dew

An' day tu'ns black an' blue,

Heish!

De po' ol' man is daid.

Heish!

Sweet peace upon his haid.

GOD BE WITH YOU.

Supposed to Have Been Sung at the Deathbed
of a Slave.

1.

God be with you in the morning,

God be with you in the evening,

SONGS OF THE SOIL

God be with you on the mountain,
God with you in the valley,
I am going home.

2.

God be with you in the starlight,
God be with you in the moonlight,
God be with you in the twilight,
God be with you in the dewtime,
I am going home.

3.

Good Michael, hitch those horses,
Good Michael, swing those lashes,
Oh, I must see the God of Glory
Within the land of happy shouting;
I am going home.

DE OL' SOJER.

You say dat Ah ain't got no kintry nor no flag?
Dat Ah's a man dat's lowah dan de wustes' beast?
Look hyeah, you heish yo' mouf! You's dumb as any
brute!

You see de stahs? You see de stripes dat mak' dis rag?
Ah cai'ed dem clean thoo all de thickest ob de fight
At Gettysbu'g an' Chattanooga w'en ol' Def
Was rakin' in de men lak leaves dat drap an' drap
An' lay erpon de groun' ontwell dey tu'n to ash an' dust.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Ah fought to mak' dis lan' a lan' dat's free f'om wrong,
Dat dipped in blood will rise again, befo No'th an' Souf,
Ontwell it reach de blessed Th'one ob Gawd Hisse'f.

W'en Marstuh Lineum called de colo'ed man to fight
Huh! huh! Ah left de ol' plantashun quick as sin,
An' ran to whaih de Yankee ahmy held daih camp.
De Cunnle wrapped de flag erroun' mah achin' bones,—
"Dis man is free!" he sayed, an' held up high his swo'd.
De sojers bowed, an' trumpets blowed—an' Ah was free.
Ah loved de Cunnle, an' Ah loved dat shiny flag,—
De stahs jes' lak de eyes ob Gawd on Freedom's night,
De stripes jes' lak what anguls waih on battlefiel's;
An' deep down' neaf de coat o' blue dey put on me
Mah hea't was beatin' fu' to see dat flag triumph.
Thoo wintah snow, thoo summah heat Ah wu'ked an' bled,
An' faced de bullets dat de ribels shot at us,
Ontwell one day w'en Johnny'ribs was lickin' us
De Cunnle say, "What man is brave enough to go
An' place his kintry's flag erpon de 'Federate fo't?"
Not one would speak, de braves' 'mongst dem white wid
feah,
An' Ah mahse'f all trimblin' to mah ve'y boot tops.
De Cunnle add: "Unless we git dat fo't we fail."
'Twas den Ah spoke, an' spoke mah wo'ds so brave an'
true,
"Gib me de flag! To-night, good sah, dat fo't is yo'n!"
W'en night come on Ah ma'ched ahaid ob all de troops,
troops,

SONGS OF THE SOIL

De Stahs an' Stripes awavin' in de summah breeze,
De gray coat bayonets a-p'intin' at mah breas',
All ready fu' to jab dis body thoo an' thoo;
But w'en de moonlight pou'ed upon dis face o' mine
White tu'ned de ribel Gin'ul, an' he cried, "A slave!
A da'ky slave! O Gawd, hab mussy on us all!"
De graycoats fiahed, de bullets rainin' thick as hail,
Dey got me in de hip, dey got me in de leg,
But Gawd dat led ol' Isr'ul was erpon mah side
An' Ah was strong enough to keep f'om earf dat flag.
De bluecoats an' de graycoats fought lak brothahs fight
While Ah went on an' on ontwell Ah retched de fo't
An' nailed ol' Marstuh Lincum's flag erpon de post.
Dey tote me back erpon de stretchah, so' wid' pain,
But on mah face de smile dat only fightahs smile,
A hero in de cause ob kintry, home an' Gawd.

An' w'en de kintry say dat Cuby must be free
Mah boy, mah Lizy's Sam went fo'th to wah,
Ah gib him to de cause, an' tol' him fight lak sin
To keep de Stahs an' Stripes f'om drappin' to the groun'.
He lies somewhaih—mah Lizy's boy!—he lies some-
whaih,

A bullet in his hea't, de flag erpon his breas'.
O Gawd ob Jacob, smile erpon dis Glohry rag
An' tell de folks dat he who fought to save daih lan'
Am jes' as much a sojer ob de Stahs an' Stripes
As any livin' No'th o' South, East o' West.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

VOICES OF THE DUSK.

I.

Do you hear the witches wailing?
Witches wailing, wailing, wailing,
Do you see the ghost robes trailing?
Ghost robes trailing, trailing, trailing
It is but a nighttime whisper,
But a whisper of the zephyr?
Or my soul in secret meeting
That dim soul whose fate is loving?
Tell me, tell me, tell me,
Voices of the Dusk.

II.

Do you see those spirits lonely?
Spirits lonely, lonely, lonely.
Can they be for lost souls only?
Lost souls only, only, only.
Are they but the fearful phantoms,
Fearful phantoms from my fancy?
Or the sprites of conscience stricken
From a region long forgotten?
Tell me, tell me, tell me,
Voices of the Dusk.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

LOYALTY.

I.

Ah'll follow you, mah husban', thoo de thickes' ob de
night,
Thoo brialh patch, thoo witch's cave, an' down de steep
ravine;
Ah'll comfo't you w'en trubble's bu'nin' you to ash an'
dust
An' you's a squ'min' in ol' Mastah Debbil's sin machine;
Ah'll chase erway de clouds an' mak' de sun to shine by
night,
De stahs to run erroun' lak happy pickaninnies do;
Ah'll wade thoo crick an' thoo de risin' ob de tide fu' you
An' walk wid you in Beulahlan' w'en dis hyeah life am
thoo.

II.

Ah'll follow you, mah husban', 'twell de stahs to earf do
drap,
A flutt'rin' lak de bu'ds de huntah shoot Octobah mo'n;
Ah'll go wid you beyon' de aidge ob all dat Gawd calls
good
An' hide wid you behin' de stone w'en Gabr'ul toot his
ho'n.
Ah'll mak yo' pa'f as rosy as de gahden in de June,
All drippin' wid de honey dew dat folkses call true love;
Ah'll be to you what you have allus longed dat Ah should
be,
Yo' precious one, yo' angul chile, yo' faif'ul tu'tle dove.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

AH'S GWINE AWAY.

I.

Daih's a lone stah in de sky,
Ah's gwine away!
Daih's a road dat totes me high,
Ah's gwine away!
Loose yo' houn' dawgs on mah scent,
'Twill be foolish talm you spent,
Ah am mighty tiahed of wu'k,
Gib to me a restful nu'k.
Ah's gwine away!

II.

Daih's a song dat soothes mah breas'
Ah's gwine away!
Daih's a ha'p dat totes me res',
Ah's gwine away!
Nevahmo' to ten' de hoe an' plow,
Nevahmo' to ben' an' scrape an' bow,
Ah is gwine to sahve a king
Dat will allus let me sing,
Ah's gwine away!

SONGS OF THE SOIL

INJUN SUMMAH.

I.

W'en de Injun summah's in de aih
Apple cidah's oozin' f'om de press,
Sweetin' tater's ripenin' on de vine,
Bobtail squ'ls de drappin' nuts caress,
Tu'key gobblah's struttin' in de ya'd
Sayin' "Howdy do" to all de folks,
Kase he's sho' Thanksgiving's comin' soon
An' he knows dat's w'en de tu'key chokes.

II.

Mammy's sittin' front de cabin do'
Breathin' in de aih dat breathes lak mo',
An' she listen to de bumble bee
'Twell lak him she sta't to hummin' low,
Daddy's in de co'nfiel', shu'kin' 'way,
Longin' fu' to heah de dinnah ho'n,
Dreams o' huntin' possum in his haid
Evah since dis Injun day was bo'n

III.

Banjo tummin' 'hin' de gread, big ba'n,
Waitin' fu' dat ha'ves' moon to come;
Sally, dressed in brightes' calico,
Wid huh lovah man is flu'tin' some;
Triflin' Zeke am sleepin' in de 'baccy fiel',
Stomach full o' cidah, ha'd as sin.—
Wu'k am out o' season when its wa'm
An' de Injun summah weathah's in.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

JOHN CROSSED THE ISLAND

(A NEGRO SPIRITUAL)

I.

John crossed the island on his knees,
John crossed the island on his knees,
John crossed the island on his knees
To see the Good Lord home.

II.

John kissed my Saviour on his brow,
John kissed my Saviour on his brow,
John kissed my Saviour on his brow
And shouted, Bless the Lord!

LIF' UP DE SPADE.

I.

Lif' up de spade; th'ow down de du't,
De Mastah's called me home at las'.
Lif' up de spade; th'ow down de du't,
An' lay mah body 'neaf de grass.
De angul's sittin' at mah foot,
Anothah's sittin' at mah haid,
An' sto'm win's croonin' mou'nful songs
Erbove de moun' dey call mah baid.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

II.

Lif' up de spade; th'ow down de du't,
An' keep Miss Lizy's teahs away.
Lif' up de spade; th'ow down de du't,
An' let me sleep 'twell Jidgement Day.
Ah's b'en thoo' trubble mighty long,
Ah's foted an' toted all mah life
An' now Ah want to res' dese bones
Erway f'om all de woe an' strife.

LAST DAYS.

I.

Oh, whaih's de chillun gone dat useter climb upon mah
knee?
Oh whaih's ol' Tige dat useter run along beside o' me?
De lonely yeahs have drapped upon dis po' ol' haid o'
mine
An' frien's have lef' me lak de needles on a wo'n out pine;
Ah's leanin' on a crutch, no one to comfo't me but Gawd,
Mah eyes erpon de Golden Street whaih walks de Shinin'
Lawd,
Tis daih dey say de chillun wait fu' me beside de Pu'ly
Gate
An' ask ol' Marstuh Petuh why daih Uncle Ned is late.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

II.

Oh whaih's de brothahs gone dat useter shout' in Bethel's
chu'ch?

Oh whaih de boys dat useter hunt de possum 'hin' de
bu'ch?

Las' night Ah hobbled down to Bethel fu' to say good bye
An', sotted on de empty bench, fu' dem Ah gib a sigh,
No mo' dey wu'k de sugahcane, no mo' de baccy leaves.
Ol' Natur's sifted dem as Mammy do de flouah in sieves,
But Ah will jine 'em soon as Ah kin lose mah achin' bones
An' laff an' talk wid dem whaih Christun nevah weeps
nor moans

UNCLE RUFUS.

I.

Daih's men dat's ol' an' men o' middlin' age
An' men dat's young but nevah wisah sage
Dan Uncle Rufus down to Fiddlin' Bay.
His haid is neithah white nor black nor gray
But jes' as smooove as Mammy Jinny's pa'm,
While he's got eyes dat's gintle lak a lam'
An' tongue dat's nimble lak a rompin' goat.
He sits befo' his cabin 'thout his coat
An' tells de passahs by jes' what is what.
He say, "De squ'l kaint live widout his nut,
De ovahseah mus' have his todody glass
An' daihfo' Uncle Rufus chance to gass."
He ahgy on de Bible fust of all

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Wid dose who say dey had ob Gawd daih call,
He tell you whethah sun go East o' Wes'
An' what fu' ailin' trubbles he thinks bes'.
We nevah christen chillun anymo'
Ontwell we tak' 'em straight to Uncle's do'.
An' ax him what he thinks daih name should be
An' if dey's gwine to die on lan' o' sea;
We nevah bury 'thout we have his wo'd
To whethah him who's daid hab seen de Lo'd
An' w'en we have a dance we call him roun'
Kase nevah kin a gayah man be foun'.
An' dat am why w'en Mammies cook daih food
Dey save fu' Rufus what dey think is gude.
Go whaih you will, no wisah man's alive,
Go whaih you will, a bettah man kaint thrive,
Kase he am good to all dat come his way,
Dis talkin' man 'way down to Fiddlin' Bay.

SHUFFLE 'LONG.

I.

Shuffle 'long befo' de break o' day,
Shuffle 'long wid Sue an' Sal an' May,
Sta't dat fiddle gwine, ol' long haihed Pete,
Dancin' on de levee sho' am sweet,
All de boys rigged out in Sunday bes',
All de gals in cutes' gingham dress,
What caih I if mo'nin' nevah come
So de fiddle play, de banjo tum.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

II.

Shuffle 'long, de heavy wu'k am done,
Shuffle 'long befo' to-morrer's sun,
Ba'n am groanin' wid de sto'ed up food,
All de folks fu' miles in happy mood,
Do de pigeon wing an' tu'n aroun',
Howdy Lady' Lize an' covah groun',
Swing yo' pahtnuh while de fiddle play,
Shuffle 'long befo' de break o' day.

PLANTATION PRAYER.

I.

No othah joy, O Lawd, but jes' to wu'k,
No othah joy but jes' to love mah folks,
To sweat an' toil beneaf de bi'lin' sun
An' in de ebenin' tell mah chillun jokes.
No othah joy but jes' to read yo' Book
By candlelight o' in de bright moonshine,
No othah joy but jes' to shout fu' You
At Bethel's chu'ch 'way down behin' de pine.

II.

O Lawd, w'en Ah am ol' an' cross an' stiff
Jes' sen' Yo' angul fu' to row me home;
An', Lawd, be good to those who's gone befo',
De happy crowd beneaf de crystal dome.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Ah want to pluck de lilies in Yo' lan',
An' play de ha'p upon de Golden Street,
Ah want mah haid to have a Glohry crown
An' sit wid all de res' at Gospul meat.

HIS SONG.

I.

Some folks am mighty fon' o' mockin' bu'ds,
Some fools will walk a mile to heah a la'k,
Some call de robin's chu'pin' mighty sweet
An' listen to it 'twell de day tu'ns da'k,
But Ah am thoo wid all b'ud foolishness
An' only caihs fu' dem w'en dey is food
Kase w'en de moon am high Ah heahs a song
Dat to mah po' ol' eahs soun' mighty gude

II.

Nowaih in all de dwellin' place ob man,
Up Simpson's Crick o' down to Green's Bayou,
Kin such a na'chul song be hu'd at all
F'um tho'ats ob Ca'line Jones o' Mandy Lou;
Its sung by green eyed fellah, yallah striped,
A hoppin' in de stream f'om lawg to lawg,
An' dat is why Ah pray to Gawd Hisse'f
An' thank Him dat He made de ol' bullfrawg.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

WAIT FU' ME.

I.

Wait fu' me, mah honey, wait fu' me
'Twell Ah mak' yo' pa'f a pa'f ob rose,
Wait fu' me ontwell de stahs go down
An' de worl' wid laughtah ovahflows;
Oh Ah want to build fu' you, mah love,
Cabin f'om de oak an' f'om de pine,
An' Ah want to know you's free f'om grief,
F'om de grief dat kills you, honey mine.

II.

Nevah moon go down upon mah love,
Nevah watah cool dis hungry flame,
Drappin' teahs an' def on hangman's tree
If dey nevah let me change yo' name;
Oh, de sweet magnoly on de branch
Sho' will die an' nevah be no mo',
Oh de crick will be mo' dry dan san'
If Ah nevah tak's you to mah do'.

DE WINDIN' ROAD.

I.

W'en Love is tiahed o' wu'k an' cabin faih
He tak's his pack an' seeks anothah lai,
De Windin' Road dat leads to Jaspuh Crick,
An' daih he po's his conjuh lotion thick.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

He shows you trees dat drap magnoly sweet
An' in de spa'klin' watuh bathes yo' feet,
He teach de lovesick bu'ds to sing daih songs
An' slyly hide f'om you de lovah's wrongs.

II.

Oh, Love is cute tuh tak' dat Windin' Road
An' ease f'om off yo' back de hebbly load,
But Love is wrong tuh tak' yo' tendah hea't
An' rudely hu't it wid his sha'pes' da't.
So you who's happy in de fiel' o' home
Leave not yo' cabin dwellin' fu' to roam
Wid deb'lish Love along de Windin' Road,
F'om whence no soul retu'ns widout a load.

THE PARTED.

I.

Retu'n, mah honey, to yo' lovah's breas'!
Fu' all de night an' day Ah's seekin' res'
F'om longin' dat is bu'nin' out mah hea't.
Retu'n, mah honey! Ah will do mah paht
To mak' yo' life lak dat anguls know
Up yondah whaih de sweetes' lilies grow,
An' nevah will Ah say a cruel wo'd
But keep mah tempah pu'fec' lak a bu'd.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

II.

Ah's achin' fu' to tech dat lovin' han'
An' fu' to let mah honey undahstan'
His voice is lak de rushin' ob de stream
Dat mak's Kaintucky lak a summah dream.
Ah's achin' fu' to roam de hills agayne,
Beyon' de fence an' up de lovah's lane,
Wid you in su'ch ob greens an' jimson weed,
Mayapple root, wild rose an' tu'nip seed

III.

O stah dat climbs 'way up de No'the'n sky,
Sen' down yo' ray upon mah lovah's eye
An' tell him how Ah pray de Lawd above
Dat He will gib me back mah honey's love.
Oh tell him dat behin' de ol' grapevine
Ah cry fu' him an' call him "precious mine,"
An' whispuh dat befo' de end o' day
Unless he come dey'll drap me 'neaf de clay.

DE ELDUH.

Heish, 'Lindy Jane! Dat Elduh's mighty fine.
He knows de Gospul an' de 'Pistles nine;
He's b'en thoo fiiah, he's b'en thoo watah too;
He's clim' f'om Satan's way to Hebben blue
An' now de worl' am sittin' at his feet.
He tak' a tex', dat holy man ob Gawd,
An' when he's thoo you's walkin' wid de Lawd;

SONGS OF THE SOIL

He tak' de weary f'om de trubble seat
An' in de coolin' watah bathes daih feet;
He tak's men f'om de pa'f dat's paved wid stone
To whaih in Glohry shines de Mastah's Th'one.
Dey say dat Jesus when He was on earf
An' made Jerusalem His restin' berf
Tol' folks erbout a kin' ol' shephu'd man
Dat cai'ed de po'lil lam's widin his han'.
Dat man was sho' de Elduh, wise an' good
An' feedin' all de flock on Gospul food;
He totes us 'neaf de mantle ob his faif
Ontwell we reach de Refuge City safe.
Oh many tahm he's walked thoo rain an' win'
To save a pusson f'om his load o' sin;
An' many tahm he's eased a dyin' baid
An' many tahm he's blessed a newbo'n haid—
His only hope to sahve his Mastah well.
You Debbil, go on dancin' down in Hell,
Go sha'pen up yo' pitchfo'k an' yo' speah,
Befo' you's thoo you's gwine to shake wid feah,
Kase him dat wu'ks fu' Gawd hab won de day
An' kep' f'om out yo' cletches dem dat's clay.

DE WITCH 'OOWAM.

Oh de ol' witch 'ooman's ridin' roun'—
Broomstick fu' to sweep de spidah down,
Eyes dat's reddah dan a bloody shu't,
Haih dat's thick wid mud an' sticks an' du't—

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Terror she to all de wide, wide worl'.
Anguls hide behin' de Gates o' Pearl,
Stahs go out awhile w'en witch flies pas',
Pries' tak' out his book an' say his mass,
Moon blows out huh light an' goes to baid,
'Kase de moon's so awful, awful 'fraid,
Milky Way gits dryah dan mah th'oat,
Mockin' bu'd too skaihied to sing a note—
Mightly scumptious doin's in de aih
W'en witch 'coman rides huh broomstick maih.
Now, mah honey chile, dis witch will git you sho'
'Less you hide yo' haid an' try to sno';
She will slam you in huh grip an' sack
An' befo' you know it on huh back
She will tote you fa' f'om home an' kin
An' will drap you in huh ol' coal bin.
Po' chile'!

WINTAH ON DE PLANTASHUN.

I.

Col' win's blowin' roun' mah cabin;
What caih I w'en co'n's a poppin'?
Col' win's howlin' thoo de valley;
What caih I w'en Johhnie's hoppin'
Roun' de fiahplace in de ebenin'?
Let ol' Natur' do huh wustes';
W'en Ah's got a pipe an' 'baccy
Dat's de talm Ah gits de cus'n.es'
— J. H. B. C.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

II.

Mandy's got a ball o' cotton,
Knittin' me a good thick stockin';
Granny's pipin' hallelujia,
In de ol' ahm chaih a-rockin'.
Oh mah stomach's full o' cookin',
Injun cake f'om off de griddle,
An' Ah's feelin' mighty frisky
As Ah heah mah daddy's fiddle.

III.

Kain't go out to do de plowin'!
Dat is why Ah sits a grinnin'.
Restin' tahm don' las' fu'evah
An' to tak' it Ah ain't sinnin'.
Wintah's best ob all de seasons
Kase its jes' de tahm fu' playin'
An' de man dat wu'ks is lucky
Kase in snoozin' he's a hayin'.

A PLANTATION SANTA CLAUS.

Las' night Ah saw ol' Santy Claus, yessah!
How was he dressed? Jes' lak an ugly bah.
How did he look? You know ol' Deacon Jones
Dat's brown lak me an' lean as sparerib bones,
Dat's got a tuf' o' haih as white as snow
An' walks to meetin' house wid step dat's slow.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Well let me see? Dat man sho' looks de paht;
He's jes' lak Santy 'cep' widin his hea't.
Fu' Santy's brown an' Santy's lean an' tall
An' waits mos' evah day in Mastah's hall.
You thought him white? What put dat in yo' haid
W'en Santy's mammy was a colo'ed maid?
Dey say he come f'om Georgy? P'raps dat's so,
But den ah'low he's f'om an islan' sho'
An' strictly brought to 'fess de Baptis' faif.
Now, Sammy, let me tell you you is safe
If you's a secret you would tell de saint.
You want some 'lasses candy an' some paint?
Well you'll git yo' wishes. Jes' you see!
You tol' ol' Santy's brothah? Huh! huh! huh! Dat's me.

THE SONG OF THE FISH MARKET.

I.

Ah's fotchin' fish to ma'ket,
Howdy, Lindy Lou!
Want gol' to fill mah pocket,
Howdy, Lindy Lou!
B'en rowin' down de rivah,
Mah fishin' undah kivalh,
Got trout an' bass an' othahs
Wid uncles, aunts an' brothahs
Howdy, Lindy Lou!

SONGS OF THE SOIL

II.

W'en fishin' Ah ain't crazy,
 Howdy, Lindy Lou!
W'en wu'kin' Ah ain't lazy,
 Howdy, Lindy Lou!
Jes' bo'n to do you salvice,
To mak' o' fish a ha'ves',
Ah'd rathah be a-sellin'
Den foolish stohries tellin',
 Howdy, Lindy Lou!

SHOUT, MY BROTHER, SHOUT.

(A NEGRO SPIRITUAL)

I.

Working in the cornfields for the Master,
Bringing in the sheaves to stack the garner,
 Shout, my brother! Shout!
Sleeping in the Master's Glory cabin ,
Dreaming of the mighty Bridegroom's coming,
 Shout, my sister! Shout!

II.

Hoing cotton 'till day of Judgment
We will reign with God in Heaven
 Shout, my brother! Shout!
Turning cheek to overseer and tyrant
We will walk the fields of God's plantation.
 Shout, my sister! Shout!

SONGS OF THE SOIL

DE DYIN' CA' LINE LOU.

I.

Jes' a cloud o' dust on Chris'mus mo'n,
Jes' li'l sunshine fu' to wa'm you thoo,
Jes' a promise dat de rain will fall
An' we know dat trubble's 'gin to brew,
Fu' ouah Ca'line Lou's been ailin' long
An' de doctah 'low she sho' will die—
Mah po' honey dat kin do no wrong—
When de Chris'mus green am drawin' nigh.

II.

Oh we raised huh lak a tendah bud,
Gib huh all dat humble folkses could,
An' we shouted lak a mou'nah saved
When in Olivet one night she stood,
Washed by Jesus ob huh sca'let sins,
An' huh angel eyes to Glohry cast,—
One mo' membah on de roll o' Christ,
One mo' lost soul clingin' to de mast.

III.

How de boys would come an' tak' huh fo'th
Fu' to walk along de Lovah's Lane!
How de boys would foteh huh violets,
Sweetes' jessamine all kissed by April rain
An' de jonquils bloomin' by de road!

SONGS OF THE SOIL

Oh, Ah hyeah huh laughtah all de time,
Oh, Ah see de gleamin' ob huh teef
An' Ah th'ow mahse'f across de baid
Fa' too weak to baih dis awful grief.

IV.

Nevah will Ah fail to see de dress
Dat Ah sewed fu' huh a yeah ago!
'Twas o' cotton f'om de Mastah's crop
An' 'twas whitah dan de newbo'n snow.
Nevah will mah mem'ry fail to see
Eb'ry ribbon dat was in huh haih,
An' Ah wish dat she was well agin
Fu' to waih dem at de County Fair.

V.

Oh, mah Gawd dat keeps de win' in check,
Dat on sco'chin' dayspo's out de sun,
If You love Yo' chillun, as dey say,
An' would keep a Christ'un free f'om pain
Jes' tak' caih to drap f'om out Yo' sieve
'Stid o' rain an' heat a lot o' snow
Fu' to mak' de Chris'mus mo'n so white
Dat mah Ca'line Lou will stay below.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

OL' LOUISVILLE.

I.

Ah long to be in deah ol' Louisville
Whaih all de folks am wa'm o' hea't an' han',
Ah long to be in deah ol' Louisville
Whaih bu'ds an' trees am bes' in all de lan';
No pavement shine so red wid Hebben's gol',
No sky so full o' Spring an' song an' cheah,
No sojers ma'chin' fo'th to fight daih foes
Have souls so free f'om hatred an' f'om feah.

II.

Oh, many nights in Louisville Ah slep'
An' smelled de sweetness ob de summah earf,
Oh, many nights Ah hu'd de boys an' gals
A-singin' 'neaf mah windah songs o' mirf,
An' on a Sund'y Ah would go to chu'ch
An' kneelin' Ah would thank de Gawd ob all
Dat simple folks an' simple ways whar mine
Whaih many othahs hu'd de No'the'n call.

III.

Daih's big ol' Lunnon fa' across de sea,
Daih's good Chicago wid huh open do',
Daih's New O'leans whaih men waih stripe'd dress
An' once a yeah a thousan' trumpets blow,
But in de valley kissed by snow an' heat
De Gawd mah fathuhs wo'shipped built His home,
An' Gabrul in de night wid bresh o' fiah
Wrote Louisville across its spa'klin' dome.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

SPINNING.

I.

Thou art deftly spinning,
 Mother mine,
Cloth of gold a-weaving,
 Mother mine!
In the shadow dusk,
When the blood of moon
Drips upon the leaves,
Slowly, slowly, slowly
From my spinnet wheel
Fate of thee and thine
Draw I ere I die,
 Daughter mine.

II.

Thou art deftly spinning,
 Mother mine,
Shroud of gold a-weaving,
 Mother mine!
'Tis the web of love
From the threads we spun
Out of moonlight dream,
Slowly, slowly, slowly
Spun we threads of love
For a silken web
Of the milk white glow,
 Daughter mine.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

III.

Thou art deftly spinning
 Mother mine,
Ages long a-weaving,
 Mother mine!
'Tis my spirit robe
Grown from silken web
That I spun erstwhile;
Slowly, slowly, slowly
Spun I fate of thee,
Spun I web of love
For a shroud of death,
 Daughter mine.

THE GOLDEN CITY.

I.

I never knew the Golden City was so near;—
The purple dreams, the haunting melody of Youth,
The votive offerings of winged Love sincere,
The rugged purpose and the lofty heights of Truth.
For I had wandered through the cavern of the Years,
And shrouded faced the bitter wind eternity;
But naught had been my lot save foolish tears
Until I saw within thy eyes maternity.—
Ah! then the Golden City gleamed upon her crest.

SONGS OF THE SOIL

II.

But little did I ween the splendour of that world;—
The golden hours restored, the mended arch of Love,
The crowning joys through sweeping time upon me
hurled,
The mercies from the jewelled Throne of God above—
But laughed a season with the dryads in the grove
And dashed the cup of Love into the boundless sea.
For I had heard sweet Pleasure whisper, "We shall rove
Where duty pines and men with souls are ever free."
'Twas then the Golden City faded as a dream.

CLOSE DE BOOK!

Close de book, Maria Jane!
Let's go walkin' down de lane.
Daih we'll hyeah a sweetuh song
Dan we kin f'om minstrel throng;
Daih we'll hyeah de mockin' bu'd
Tellin' robin 'bout de bu'd
Dat chu'ps sweetes' in de June.
Daih we'll see de face ob noon
Shinin' in de bubblin' stream,
Brightuh dan an angel gleam.
What's de use o' readin' now
W'en behin' ol' Mastah's plow
We kin walk wid Gawd Hisse'f,
Drinkin' in ol' Natur's bre'f?

THE END.









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